

Local studies collections, librarians and the Norwegian local history wiki

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Abstract:

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss the relevance of local studies collections and contributions from local studies librarians to a Norwegian local history wiki.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper will focus on access to metadata in form of bibliographies, databases and catalogues, in addition to general articles on local history. The methodological approach is qualitative and comparative based on semi-structured interviews with librarians in charge of local studies collections and with the administrators of the wiki. The study includes an analysis of a selection of local studies collections and criteria for inclusion into the local history wiki. A short comparison with history wikis in other countries is added.

Findings – Local studies collections contain valuable and unique material for the wiki, especially metadata resources. The expertise of librarians could increase the value of the wiki. Generally, librarians are not active contributors. Strategies for involvement are needed.

Originality/value - The paper may encourage and inspire local studies librarians to contribute actively to the wiki and incorporate relevant parts of their collections.

Key words – Wikis, Local history, Librarians, Collections, Bibliographies

Paper type – Case study

Introduction

We live in an increasingly globalised world. At the same time individuals search for roots and local identity. The characteristics of identity can be linked to specific places or communities. It may be a street, an urban district or a town, a rural area or a country. Identity may be defined by nationality, ethnicity, physical appearance and cultural traditions. The dialect we speak, the way we think, and the relations we have to our family, workplace or community, are usually seen as important when we wish to describe who we are. In this respect local history is important. To understand the present, we need to know what has happened in the past. Our personal history is a defining aspect of our identity.

What role can libraries' local studies collections play in this context and what challenges do librarians meet as possible mediators, producers and cooperating partners? What sort of material from local studies collections could be relevant for the local history wiki and how can the librarian participate in it?

In recent years internet has become a medium for social networks, which is characterized by the creating and sharing of information. This transformation is called Web 2.0. Important tools for sharing information are Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter, blogs and wikis.

Wikipedia is one of the most popular of these networks. Basically, it is an internet encyclopedia where everyone can publish and edit articles. Most people become familiar with the wiki principle of collaborative content through Wikipedia.

Could the wiki medium be a channel for the organization, dissemination and presentation of local studies materials and could this be an opportunity for the local history librarian to participate in networks created on the wiki platform?

Methodology

After the introduction of the Norwegian local history wiki, three local studies collections have been selected for closer inspection as to what type of material could be suited for entering into the wiki. The focus is on metadata sources, bibliographies (print or digital), bibliographic databases and catalogues, as well as articles and other contributions to local history. A set of criteria is tentatively established for the discussion. The collections are situated in *Eiker archive* (*Eiker arkiv*), *Sogndal library* (*Sogndal bibliotek*) and the *County library of Nordland* (*Nordland fylkesbibliotek*). They have been chosen because they have large collections of digitized material, of different types, and offer different solutions for cooperation within the archives', libraries' and museums' (ALM) sector. Other collections are commented upon if relevant. It is followed by a discussion of how local history librarians can contribute to the wiki with their special qualifications and expertise. The sources of information for the study are from the local history wiki, interviews with librarians in charge of the collections and with the administrators of the wiki. The methodological approach is the semi-structured interview, which is open and sets few limitations to the answers given (Lindlof, 2002, p. 195). The disadvantage of this method is the subjective interpretation and possible wrong assessment.

The Norwegian local history wiki

In March 2008 a local history wiki (www.lokalhistoriewiki.no) was launched by the Norwegian Institute of Local History (*Norsk lokalhistorisk institutt*) (NILH), in cooperation with some of the administrators of the Norwegian version of Wikipedia (Øvrebø, 2008). The NILH had been looking for an online community website for some time and the administrators of Wikipedia had discussed creating a special wiki for articles too local or research oriented for the general Wikipedia. So both NILH and Wikipedia seemed a good match for a joint effort. Even though there are many wikis dedicated to specific subjects and localities, this is the first local history wiki, run by a state institute, where everyone interested may participate, both amateurs and professional historians. The local history wiki is not a subdivision or a clone of Wikipedia, but an independent project based on its own premises, not even necessarily encyclopedic in form. Contributors may present all sorts of source material linked to specific geographic places: articles, photos, videos, sound and newspaper cuttings and bibliographies, i.e. the type of material which the local librarian has spent time

acquiring, organizing and presenting. In order to profile the local collection and attract a wider audience, the wiki could be an important depository.

NIHL is responsible for the wiki, its structure and observance of copyright and privacy rules etc. It answers for the authority and credibility of the site. However, it is not accountable for the content of the individual article, the photos etc, which is the responsibility of the contributors. NILH is a state institution under the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs (*Kultur- og kirkedepartementet*). The main tasks of the institute are to give information about local history, conduct research and give assistance to writers of local history. It maintains a website (*lokalhistorie.no*) which contains exhaustive information on all aspects of local history in Norway. In addition it has compiled an inventory of local history worldwide, with national presentations for a number of countries and introductory articles with external links (*localhistory.no*).

In order to discuss the relevance of the wiki for local studies collections, it is necessary to take a closer look into the organization and structure of the wiki and in particular the criteria for inclusion of materials.

Organization and structure of the Norwegian local history wiki

Generally, wikis are collaborative projects for people who believe they have knowledge on subjects covered by the wiki. They work together, with the purpose of creating an overall information resource. The communication model is many to many and the wiki is organized by content, in contrast to for instance blogs, which are structured by reversed chronology (Meling, 2007, p. 8). The term *wiki* indicates the speed with which the content is updated. Other advantages are the easy creation and editing of interlinked web pages by means of the wiki software MediaWiki.

The local history wiki is structured in accordance to the wiki format and adapted to local history content. The standard wiki design is easily recognizable by sections for featured articles, random articles, methodology articles, current events, and a section for the main regions in Norway. The topics are arranged by categories and portals. The main section of the wiki is called the Common Area (*Allmenningen*). This is open for contributions from anyone who is interested in writing on a local history topic, big or small. A special section is dedicated to materials which can be used as sources for articles. The Gallery is a special room for photos which may be used to illustrate articles or entries. A condition for uploading photos is that they are not bound by copyright. Contributors are encouraged to produce their own photos. A section for articles on historical methodology functions as a toolbox for the historian. It contains basic articles on critical evaluation of sources, genres and different theoretical aspects of local history.

A major contribution to the Norwegian local history wiki is the Norwegian Historical Encyclopedia (*Norsk historisk leksikon*). NIHL has been working on this encyclopedia for decades. It has been published in many editions, the first one in 1974 and the last one in 1999. These articles in the wiki are locked and not subject to change or editing, because of copyright rules. The administrators of the wiki fear the entries will be outdated, as parallel articles are

written in the Common Area. It covers the period from about 1500 to about 1800. It is adapted to the wiki format in agreement with the publisher Cappelen Academic Publishers (*Cappelen Akademisk Forlag*). Each entry has to be categorized with subject headings, in order to make it searchable from the main categories page. The categorization is a difficult and challenging task. The encyclopedia is a key reference work dealing with central topics on Norwegian cultural and social history. Many of the entries are lexical explanations to historical terminology. In that respect it resembles a dictionary more than an encyclopedia. The entries are difficult to find elsewhere, so it serves an important function for local historians.

Criteria for acceptance of articles in the Norwegian local history wiki

The condition for allowing articles into the wiki is that they are relevant for specific geographic places in Norway or that they may be useful for anyone dealing with local history. But most important, they must be interesting from a local history perspective.

But who is to decide what is interesting, or useful, or valuable, and for whom?

This is entrusted to the subjective assessment of the *administrator* who vets the contributions, firstly if they are in accordance with the guidelines, the copyright and privacy rules, and secondly if they meet the quality standards of the wiki. In cases of doubt, the *advisors* or NIHL may be consulted.

Historical articles on a national level may also be included if they carry importance for the local community. Topics like markets, trade, demography or the Second World War can be treated both on a national and a local level. The same phenomenon can affect many places and they can be categorized in dynamic lists. Other articles, not related to places, must have a justification for inclusion, i.e. they must be important or interesting for the local historian.

All contributors are recommended to sign up with their full name and e-mail address. Articles are identified by user names, thus avoiding vandalism or improper content. In a section at the bottom of the pages, the names of the main contributors are listed.

The authority of the NIHL and the supervision of the *administrators* and *advisors* are factors to ensure reliability and quality.

Relevance of the local studies collections for the Norwegian local history wiki

On the basis of the structure of the wiki and criteria for acceptance - mentioned above - what sort of materials from the local studies collections could naturally be incorporated in the wiki?

At this early stage it must be emphasized that the wiki is not a complete product. It is rather a dynamic process, a constantly changing organism. What it will contain in the future is an open question.

Should the materials incorporated in the wiki be unique and original in the sense that there are no replicas in other depositories, or could they coexist?

Generally, the wiki is not meant to compete with the local or national digitalization projects from the National or regional archives, or the National or public libraries. It is primarily meant for unique material and especially user generated materials and memorabilia, linked to places and local events, irrespective of format (video, audio or simple text files).

Local studies materials elsewhere may be linked to the wiki together with a short description, if it serves a purpose.

This could be metadata in form of bibliographies or bibliographic databases. Printed bibliographies could be entered into the wiki, and adapted to the wiki format, if it refers to a place or an interesting topic. Many local printed bibliographies have been worked out by librarians or library students over the years. If they are linked to articles in the wiki, they could be valuable sources of information.

Bibliographies and bibliographic databases in the Norwegian local history wiki

It is necessary to distinguish between bibliographic work on the national level and on the local level, between retrospective and current bibliographies and between those bibliographic databases which record journal articles and those which do not.

Bibliographies on the local level

The NILH's website has a special section on sources and literature that contains an extensive list of bibliographies, handbooks, guides, lists of institutions and websites for local historians, including a bibliographic database for cross-database search in different sources and material (not on article level). There are seven databases in all. One of them is Master and Bachelor theses 1907-2000 (*Hovedoppgaver 1907-2000*). A search on the term *bibliografi* retrieves 87 references to local history bibliographies dating back from the 1970s and covering all parts of Norway. After the year 2000 the data base system *Bibsys* can be searched, because local history bibliographies produced by students as bachelor theses are recorded here on a current basis. *Bibsys* is a national union catalogue for the universities, university colleges and special libraries in Norway. The holdings of these libraries may include books and journals not found in the National bibliography.

The main bibliographic database in the NIHL system, Norwegian local history literature, 1900-2000 (*Norsk lokalhistorisk litteratur*) does not, however, index articles from local history journals. It only records books and journal titles. This is done in special subject (retrospective) databases or the current article index of the National library.

NILH's survey is perhaps the most comprehensive inventory of general local history bibliographies and it will be transferred to the local history wiki in a separate section. This work has just begun. The bibliographic section has been established in the wiki, but it is not yet visible from the wiki's main page. This "bibliographic room" could also contain bibliographic articles or descriptions of the databases and the bibliographies, for instance supplied by contributing librarians.

In this section of the wiki there is a need for a detailed description on the bibliographic work done on the national level and perhaps a note on how to retrieve the records with local history significance. This could perhaps be done in the form of a bibliographic essay / article, with links to the mentioned databases?

Bibliographies on the national level

The National library maintains the National bibliography which in principle records all printed matter published in Norway. In addition the National library maintains the database *Norwegian articles (Norart)* which indexes the major part of Norwegian journals on a current basis. Among the journals indexed in this database, are about 117 (October 2009) local history journals, yearbooks or other periodicals. This is only a selection of Norwegian local history journals (Sveum, 1991, p. 65). It is therefore important for the local librarians to index local history periodicals on a current basis, if they are not covered by *Norwegian articles*. A survey of which local history periodicals are indexed can be found in the database.

Besides, the National library maintains a number of other historical databases or subject databases with relevance for local history: *Bibliography of Norway's History (Norhist)*, *Theses in history at Norwegian universities 1945-1993 (Histhov)*, *Norwegians in America*, and *Thor M. Andersen's bibliography (TMA)*. Bibliographies in other Nordic countries could be linked to the local history wiki, if the literature recorded is relevant for Norwegian local history, for instance Swedish Sami bibliography (*Svensk samisk bibliografi*).

Finally, it must be mentioned that articles in the Norwegian Historical Review (*Historisk tidsskrift*) and the Norwegian local history journal *Heimen* has been indexed back from the start 1877/1922, by the Norwegian Historical Data Centre (NHDC) at the University of Tromsø.

Bibliographies must be considered primary tools for retrieving local history information. There is a huge bibliographic apparatus for local history in Norway, dating back to the beginning of the previous century. Unfortunately the bibliographies and bibliographic databases are scattered around in different libraries or institutions, both national and local.

The NIHL's inventory of local history bibliographies will give access from one place in the wiki. If the bibliographic section will be open for change, the entries can be supplemented, edited and updated, for instance by local history librarians. For contributors to the wiki, the bibliographic section could determine what (if anything) has been written on a subject or add missing sources to existing articles.

The bibliographic section in the Norwegian local history wiki

Presently there are six entries in the "bibliographic room", two bibliographies for individual authors and four bibliographies on the municipalities, Hol, Skedsmo, Aure and Oppegård. One of them, Aure, is just a tentative sketch, while that of Skedsmo is a proper local history bibliography, adapted to the wiki format. The introduction to the bibliographic article of Skedsmo states that the idea is to present a survey of local history literature, maps, printed sources, films etc. The hope is to give ideas to future articles. The arrangement of entries is

alphabetical according to subject. Some of the entries are links to full text documents. The bibliographic article is linked to the article on Skedsmo in the *Common Area* and vice versa, but they are not very visible from either page.

Could this entry form the model for future bibliographic articles? As the article can be freely used under the wiki free license, anyone can edit, contribute, supplement and update this article.

If bibliographies are entered and adapted to the wiki format, it should be an important goal to link as many references as possible to full text documents. The National library of Norway aims at the digitization of its entire collection. By January 2009 20% of all book titles ever published in Norway was in digital format (St.meld. nr. 24 (2008-2009)). At this stage, a selection of 14 000 titles can be accessed through the website The Bookshelf (*bokhylla.no*). Hopefully, in the not so distant future, a major part of Norwegian books and journals will be available through the internet. Potentially, bibliographic references in the local history wiki may be linked to full text books and journal articles. Google Books may offer access to books in full text written by foreigners on Norway.

The local history collections of *Eiker archive*, *Sogndal library* and the *County library of Nordland* and relevance for the Norwegian local history wiki

Eiker archive was established in January 2003 and is a local history archive for two libraries (*Øvre and Nedre Eiker*). The main purpose of the archive is to record and present different types of local historical documents i.e. from the ALM sector, private archives, audio visual materials, documentation of cultural monuments and museum objects. The digitization of these documents is an important task. The work is done on a voluntary basis by the members of the local historical association.

The main editor of the website, Bent Ek, is also a contributor to the local history wiki. *Eiker archive* contains a digital encyclopedia with articles on “everything” concerning the local history of *Øvre and Nedre Eiker*. Because it is an encyclopedia it should fit well into the local history wiki. Anyone can write articles in the Eiker encyclopedia (*Eiker leksikon*). In principle all the articles could be entered into the local history wiki. One article already has been. The last article entered into the Eiker encyclopedia is dated 13 May 2008 and written by Bent Ek. The article is about history of the copper mines in *Øvre Eiker (Bergsgruvene)*. The history of the page show how the article evolves from a “stub” to a complete article. To convert all the articles would be a huge task. But it may be worth the effort. The article may be updated, enlarged and supplied with internal links to other interesting items. Categories of broader terms are at the bottom of the page. Other assets are the standard wiki form and the possibility to discuss the article with other contributors. Importantly, it will be accessible through the Google search. A search on *Bergsgruvene* in Google retrieves the article as number three on the hit list.

The most interesting part of the *Eiker archive*, from a bibliographic point of view, is the web page *Eiker digital library (Eiker digitale bibliotek. EDB)*. It contains different types of digitized materials including a local bibliography with references to books and articles etc.

NIHL's inventory does not mention this bibliography. There is only a general reference to the *Eiker archive*.

Sogndal library In a three year period from 1999 to 2001 The Norwegian Directorate for Public Libraries (*Statens bibliotektilsyn*) financed an ambitious networks project for local history in Norwegian public libraries, the so called "Screen contact with local history. Internet as a channel for local history". The Directorate (now incorporated into The Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority (*ABM-utvikling*)) aimed at digitizing, presenting and making accessible a selection of local history materials from seven public libraries. An important part of the project was to try out new models for cooperation in the ALM-sector. Local history seemed to be well suited for cooperation between libraries, museum and archives. Three libraries targeted school children with digitized and specially prepared materials for use in their assignments. Other project goals included solving technological and copyright problems in connection with publishing on the internet (*Skjermkontakt med lokalhistorien*, 2001).

A successful result of these projects was that Sogndal library established an Ask the Librarian service for local history, in cooperation with the local museum and archive (*Lokalhistorisk spørjevev*) In addition a separate database for local literature was established (*Fjognedok*) and a digital encyclopedia (*Kulturhistorisk leksikon*).

As with the *Eiker archive* all the articles in the encyclopedia could, in principle, be entered into the wiki.

The special database for local history literature and the Ask the Librarian service for local history are among the entries in the NIHL's inventory.

The **County library of Nordland** has a special website *Digibib.no* for publishing digitized local history materials, films, radio and TV-programs, photos, books and articles. On the front page are featured articles with stories from working life or special events, in different formats. In a section for digitized books there is a bibliography relating to accounts of Italians travels to the North. The bibliography and the travel accounts are in full text; the travel accounts include drawings and maps. The *County library of Nordland* has digitized the material itself. So it could well be entered into the local history wiki. Presently, some of the county libraries seem to be at the forefront in offering digitized local history material on the internet. The county libraries operate as a coordinating network for the libraries on the local level. The Norwegian Library Act states that all public libraries should have local studies material and that the county library must have such collections (*Bibliotekloven*, 1985).

Finally **Harstad library** and **Fredrikstad library** ought to be mentioned as examples of good cooperating partners for the local history associations. Some of the members from these associations have written hundreds of entries in the local history wiki. From the websites of the local studies departments of these libraries there are pointers directly to the main articles referring to Harstad and Fredrikstad in the wiki.

Criteria for entering material from local studies collections to the Norwegian local history wiki

Much of the material in these collections could, in principle, be entered into the local history wiki. But should it, and for what reasons? The general criteria for acceptance of articles in the wiki are that they are interesting, relevant, and important and within copyright and privacy rules.

The wiki concept is based on collaboration. The content is the result of many contributions of equal partners. The contributors should consequently decide what is worth entering. If the *administrators* disagree, for formal reasons or because of content, the contribution may be discussed, changed or rejected. If the author of an article, in the above mentioned encyclopedias, finds out that the article could fit into the wiki, there is no reason why it should not be included. The idea with wikis is that whoever wishes to contribute, can do it.

Evaluative criteria such as authority, reliability, accuracy, currency and validity etc. cannot automatically be applied to material in the local studies collection. The local history librarian acquires material which he or she thinks is important for the collection, not if it is reliable or accurate. The most insignificant leaflet or obscure newsletter may contain valuable information, and potentially be the missing piece in a puzzle - in the collective memory of the community. Peter H. Reid writes: "The good, the bad and the indifferent all have a place within the collection; the 'bad' item may be unreliable, inaccurate, lacking in authority but it may also contain one single paragraph that is priceless in local terms." (2003, p. 207).

One last evaluative criterion should be added, that of comprehensiveness. Comprehensive coverage is an important goal both for the local studies collection, the local history bibliography and the bibliographic section of the local history wiki.

How can local studies librarians contribute to the Norwegian local history wiki?

Local studies librarians could write about topics which they are interested in, or are missing in the wiki, or their users are asking for, or are relevant for their specific locality. In fact, they may contribute in a number of ways, to improve the contents and quality of the local history wiki.

Librarians are experts in fields, which could be valuable for the wiki, for instance information storage and retrieval, classification and subject headings, description and cataloguing of materials. Presently there are problems with creating subject headings in the local history wiki, so that relevant articles cannot be retrieved from the different sections. In this respect librarians could be of assistance. Librarians are trained in the theory of literary genres and could for instance contribute with an article on the genre of fiction in local history literature, presently missing in the wiki.

In particular librarians could contribute with their bibliographic expertise by creating bibliographies and supply links to bibliographic databases. Wiki articles, where literature references are scant or missing, could be supplied with references from special local history or subject bibliographies.

To name an example, the wiki article on the Pite Sami in Northern Sweden has only one reference to a newspaper article. A search could be generated in the special database Swedish Sami bibliography and linked to the article. A click on this link would retrieve a large number of references on the topic. In this case one might question the inclusion of a topic which refers to a place outside Norway. But everything which is interesting from a Norwegian local perspective, whether it be emigration to The Midwest of America, immigration to Norway from Pakistan, Norwegian national minorities, like the Sami, can be included in the wiki.

Marketing is important for the wiki, and a natural place for doing so is the local library. There are libraries in every single municipality or town in Norway. The NIHL has made a brochure about the wiki and a step by step tutorial on how to get started. These can be downloaded and distributed to anyone interested. An important target group is young people, who are familiar with the new social media and web-based technologies. School children should perhaps be given a special section in the wiki, where articles from local history assignments in schools could be included, for instance assignments based on interviews with old people. Other target groups could be immigrants or newcomers to the community, professional or amateur historians, genealogists, journalists and local politicians. Both old and young have something to contribute to the local history wiki.

As a minimum of marketing, the librarian should link from their local history website to the wiki, with some introductory comment.

Norwegian librarians and Wikipedia

Very few librarians in Norway contribute to the Norwegian version of Wikipedia, either with content or corrections. Only 7% answered positively on this question in a recent study by Skibenes (2007). This figure is in line with a worldwide survey by the Wikimedia Foundation, which found that only 13% of women are active contributors to the online encyclopedia (LaVallee, 2009). At the moment there are only three librarians contributing actively in the local history wiki, two of them are employed by the NILH. Bearing in mind that two thirds of the personnel in Norwegian libraries are women, active strategies for recruiting and involvement in the local history wiki are needed. Nevertheless, librarians in Norway use Wikipedia extensively in the reference service. A search in the archive of the Norwegian Ask the Librarian service (*Biblioteksvar.no*), show that about 20 answers are links to the local history wiki.

Wikis and user generated content in other countries and institutions

This type of local history wiki seems to be unique in so far as it seems to have no parallel in other countries. The NILH has presented the wiki project to similar institutions in the other Nordic countries. They have shown interest, but not been willing to start or take responsibility for one.

A historical wiki, which is run by a governmental department, is the National Archives, UK. On their website they have a link to Your Archives (yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk) which is a wiki where users can contribute and share information concerning archival sources in National Archives or other archives in the UK. In this archival wiki the users can edit

existing pages or articles, submit new articles on historical subjects or records, and work together in social networks, in much the same way as in the Norwegian local history wiki. In a presentation at a seminar in Copenhagen March 28, 2009, Ruth Selman from the National Archives, UK told the audience that her institution was experimenting with online community platforms like Flickr, Facebook and YouTube in order to target new audiences, especially the young, by exploiting the “wisdom of the crowds” as opposed to the “wisdom of the experts” (Selman, 2009).

In the museum sector, the Victoria and Albert Museum, a museum of art and design, has tried out new ways to establish communication and dialog with their visitors through a project called *Every Object Tells a Story*. Children and adults were invited to contribute stories about the objects in the V&A museum and give their own interpretation and meaning to the artifacts. In a more specialized website the V&A museum invites their visitors to share their knitting designs with others, by just clicking on a link, fill out a form and load up the knitting photos.

In a historical wiki created by Minnesota Historical Society (www.placeography.org) the visitors can describe buildings, places and localities and include their memories and stories about them. Many historical societies have joined the placeography portal and the same place can have many stories and memories connected to them.

Concluding remarks

“Globally, the sense of *Heimat* has re-emerged as a potent force. The internet and the creation of digital records about people, places and events and subjects enable many users to feel that they are overcoming the diaspora that perhaps took their parents or grandparents away from a particular community.” (Reid, 2003, p. 226).

The local history wiki offers an opportunity to share *your* memories of that particular place which is – or once was – so important, thus overcoming the prevalent feeling of “not belonging”. All local history is potentially interesting and because local history now can be accessed from anywhere it will attract a wider audience. Through the wiki platform people may now contribute to local history themselves.

The local studies collections contain unique and valuable digitized materials. Entered into the wiki it could increase its value, importance and usefulness. Through the Google search, the materials are easily accessed.

The librarian can contribute to the local history wiki in a number of ways, in particular with bibliographic data. Bibliographic references linked to documents in full text would make the local history wiki a comprehensive depository. Members of the general public may contribute with their memories and general articles on local history. The competence and expertise of librarians would enhance the value of the wiki. For those who wish to contribute, the “bibliographic room” may be the right place to start.

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